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RUEHDM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 4179
RUEHJI AMEMBASSY JIDDA 2934
RUEHJM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 3351
RUEHRH AMEMBASSY RIYADH 2686
RUEHTV AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 4054
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E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PINT, PREL, LE, IR
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH HUSSEIN KANAAN, CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL OF THE SOUTH

1. CONFIDENTIAL. ENTIRE TEXT.

2. POLOFF MET JUNE 5 WITH HUSSEIN KANAAN, FOR SEVERAL YEARS CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF THE SOUTH, A VIRTUALLY MORIBUND GOL BODY SET UP TO CHANNEL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE TO THE AREA. ALTHOUGH CONVERSATION TOOK PLACE DURING NABIH BARRI'S PROCLAIMED "WEEK OF THE SOUTH," KANAAN DEFLECTED MOST QUESTIONS ON THE ISSUE, PREFERRING INSTEAD TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF DIVISIONS WITHIN THE SHIA COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. FOLLOWING ARE HIGH POINTS.

3. IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN THE BIQA'. KANAAN HAD JUST RETURNED FROM HIS HOME CITY OF BA'LABAKK WHERE HE HAD ATTENDED HIS MOTHER'S FUNERAL. HE SAID HE WAS SHOCKED BY THE VIRULENCE OF THE IRANIAN HATRED OF ALL THINGS AMERICAN, BUT EVEN MORE BY THE DEGREE TO WHICH SUCH ATTITUDE IS GAINING GROUND AMONG YOUNG LEBANESE SHIA THERE WITH CONSEQUENT NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EVENTUAL RETURN OF GOL POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN THE AREA). KANAAN SAID THAT THE BIQA' USED TO BE PRO-AMAL, OF THE MUSA SADR VARIETY, BUT THAT WITH BARRI'S ASCENDANCE, INTEREST HAS SHIFTED TO HIZBALLAH, WITH A HEAVY SPRINKLING OF NON-AMAL LOYALISTS. AMONG HIZBALLAH, KANAAN REGARDS CLERICS MUHAMMAD HUSSEIN FADLALLAH AND HUSSEIN SUSHI TUFAYLI AS PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS, THE LATTER, TO BE THE MOST "AGGRESSIVE" AND DANGEROUS. KANAAN SAID THAT HE HAD REPORTED ON THE WHOLE BIQA' SITUATION TO AMAL GENAYEL EARLIER THIS WEEK (A MEETING WAS REPORTED IN THE PRESS), WHEREUPON GEMAYEL ASKED HIM TO FORM A COMMITTEE OF "SHIA INTELLECTUALS" TO ADVISE HIM ON HOW TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM.

4. SHAMS AD-DIN. KANAAN SAID THAT VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE SHIA HIGHER COUNCIL MUHAMMAD MAHDI SHAMS AD-DIN WAS DUE BACK IN BEIRUT JUNE 6 FOLLOWING AN EXTENDED STAY IN PAKISTAN, INDIA, AND, MOST RECENTLY, IRAN, WHERE HE HAD TRIED AND FAILED TO MEET WITH KHOMEINI. (KHOMEINI ALLEGEDLY PASSED THE WORD THAT THE HAND THAT HAD BEEN EXTENDED TO AMIN GEMAYEL WOULD NOT "TOUCH HIS.") ASKED WHY SHAMS AD-DIN HAD PASSED THROUGH TEHRAN, KANAAN SAID THAT HE HAD HOPED TO INVEST HIMSELF INTO SOME KIND OF MEDIATORY ROLE AMONG LEBANON, SYRIA, AND IRAN. HIS DAUGHTER ALSO LIVES IN IRAN. KANAAN MUSED THAT SHAMS AD-DIN IS NOW FACED WITH THREE POSSIBLE FUTURE COURSES OF ACTION: EITHER HE MUST CONFINE THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HIGHER COUNCIL TO THOSE OF A CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION; MUST JOIN FORCES WITH HIZBALLAH; OR MUST ALIGN HIMSELF WITH BARRI. HE CANNOT CONTINUE TO MAKE POLITICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS ON THE SOUTH AS AN INDEPENDENT ENTITY. KANAAN COMMENTED THAT SHAMS AD-DIN'S BIGGEST MISTAKE WAS TO DIVORCE HIMSELF FROM AMAL, WHICH HAS PLACED HIM IN HIS PRESENT PREDICAMENT, AND HE REMAINS UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE FROM SHIA MUFTI ABD AL-AMIR QABALAN AND IMAM MUSA SADR'S SISTER RABAB TO STAY OUT OF AMAL. CERTAIN WEALTHY SHIA "FEUDAL LORDS" ALSO WANT SHAMS AD-DIN TO REMAIN ALOOF FROM AMAL LEST HE BE SUBMERGED BY THE ORGANIZATION.

5. THE SOUTH. KANAAN SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN UNHAPPY TO HEAR THAT BARRI HAD GOTTEN THE MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIO FOR THE SOUTH. KANAAN WOULD HAVE PREFERRED CHAMOUN, "WHO CAN TALK TO THE ISRAELIS. BARRI CAN ONLY SHOUT SLOGANS." KANAAN SAID THAT KARAMI IS WILLING TO TALK DIRECTLY WITH THE ISRAELIS, BUT HE MUST DEFER TO SYRIAN WISHES NOT TO. ACCORDING TO KANAAN, THE SYRIANS TOLD SHAMS AD-DIN THAT THEY PREFER THAT THE LEBANESE WORK THROUGH THE UN, WITH SOVIET HELP. THEY ARE PUSHING KARAMI TO TRAVEL TO MOSCOW, BUT KARAMI INTENDS TO CONTINUE TO RESIST.

6. COMMENT: KANAAN, A ONE-TIME MUSA SADR ASSOCIATE, HAS LONG RESENTED THE POLITICAL SUCCESS OF "MY FORMER UNDERLING" BARRI, AND WE HAVE OMITTED HIS DIATRIBE ABOUT AMAL BEING INFILTRATED BY "KHOMEINISTS, PALESTINIAN 'TRASH,' AND COMMUNISTS," ALWAYS THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNIST, HE HAS WORKED HIS WAY INTO SHAMS AD-DIN'S CIRCLE OF ADVISORS, AND HAS RECENTLY ACQUIRED SOME PROMINENCE AS HIS HERETOFORE NEGLECTED COUNCIL OF THE SOUTH HAS AT LEAST BEEN GIVEN INCREASED LIP-SERVICE BY THE GOL. KANAAN'S COMMENTS ON SHAMS AD-DIN LIKELY REFLECT THE FACT THAT WITH HIS RECENT EMBRACE OF THE SOUTHERN CAUSE, BARRI IS MAKING INROADS INTO POLITICAL TERRITORY WHICH WAS ONCE THE PRESERVE OF SHAM AD-DIN. BART-GLOVER
END OF MESSAGE

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